

In the Meantime

by Uovoc

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Summary: Hiccup guides Snotlout's hand to the Nightmare's nose...and the teens magically turn up just in time to save Stoick and Gobber from being incinerated. What went on in the interim? HTTYD drabble collection.

## 1. In the meantime

"See?" said Hiccup. "Nothing to be afraid of." He hoped desperately that his statement remained true.

Snotlout looked just one sudden move on the Nightmare's part from wetting his pants. Because Snotlout was utterly petrified, Hiccup had to gently steer him around its head. He hoped Lout couldn't feel his hands shaking.

"Ooookay, now you're just gonna get right up here, watch out for that neck spike!"

"What?!" hissed Snotlout, spinning around. "You want me to put this"he pointed at his rear"on that?"he jabbed a stubby finger at the Nightmare. "It could burst into flames at any second!"

"Which he hasn't," Hiccup said pointedly. \_Yet\_, he added in his mind, just to make this statement really foolproof. "He's perfectly safe." Given how things had turned out at his last appearance in the ring, he couldn't blame them for not buying that little white lie. Which was why befriending the Nightmare was crucial. The rest of the dragons would be smooth sailing. (Speaking of sailing, it must have been almost an hour since their parent had departed. Berk was the size of, well, Berk. How could it have taken so long for him and Astrid to find four teens when two of them were nearly conjoined, one was basically a furry mattress, and one never left Astrid alone?)

"Hiccup, there is no way I'm getting on that thing!"

"You have to trust me. Trust him." He was pleading with the dragon, too. He truly, truly wished that there was enough time for them to properly get to know each other. But if they didn't hurry, the Queen was going to have the best meal of her life. He gave the Nightmare a plaintive look, which it acknowledged with a lazy wink of one slit-pupiled eye.

It opened its jaws wide, but couldn't close them again, because it had Snotlout lodged between its teeth. It shook him about like a dead fish.

"It's gonna eat him!" yelled Ruffnut in great excitement.

"A-actually, the Monstrous Nightmare prefers to set its prey on fire and consume it while still lit," babbled Fishlegs.

"Hiccup," shrieked Astrid. "Do something!"

"Mmmmmffgh," went bits of arm and leg that protruded beyond the dragon's mouth.

"Uh, uh, don't eat him, he doesn't wash!" Great, just fantastic, way to start out on the right foot, at least it was Lout, no, don't think that, you gotta save him!"

The Nightmare appeared to be enjoying itself to no end. With a sharp jerk of its head, it tossed Snotlout high into the air (like a cat toying with a mouse, they all thought miserably) and caught him neatly on its neck. Everyone winced in sympathy, even Ruff. Astride the dragon, Snotlout squeaked. The Nightmare surveyed their stupefied faces with a look of immense satisfaction.

"Cool!" burst out the twins.

Astrid was silent, because she wasn't breathing.

"I think I'll, uh, stick with the Gronkle," muttered Fishlegs weakly.

To Hiccup's relief, the Gronkle was positively docile by comparison. Not for the first time, he wondered if dragons knew how to behave around specific people. Nah, he thought dryly, thinking about Toothless's meet-and-greet with Astrid. Well, two down, three to go. Scratch that, Astrid was already perched atop the Nadder.

"Figures, you choose the pretty one," smirked Tuffnut. The Nadder's tail spikes didn't miss him by inches. Astrid patted her dragon wonderingly and, noted Hiccup, gleefully. Only the twins were left now.

"I call the Zippleback!" Ruffnut shouted.

"Aww, man, I wanted that one," whined her brother. He turned to Hiccup. "Hey, what else you got?"

"Uh, that's it, actually." They were a Viking village, not a traveling reptile show. "Except, well, there's this." He gestured

weakly at the Terrible Terror.

Tuffnut gulped, backing away. "Yeah, very funny." Everyone else agreed. Even Astrid was grinning.

Hiccup sighed. They were losing precious time. He figured their parents would reach the nest in less than an hour, provided that Toothless cooperated. Not that he had much of a choice, given that he was trapped on a ship with a tribe of heavily armed Vikings. \_Lead them in a couple circles, bud. I'm on the way. \_When Toothless had taken him and Astrid, the trip there had taken forever. On the other hand, the flight back to Berk had felt like minutes. (It may, he mused, have had something to do with the fact that they were surrounded by wild dragons on the way there, while Astrid had clung to him the entire way back.) He guessed that the nest was nearer rather than farther; the dragons had made Berk their happy hunting ground, after all.

But this group was made up of inexperienced riders and dragons, and, gods, they hadn't even tried to fly yet. No fancy saddles or safety lines for them, no sir, just a plain coil of rope, thankeeverymuch. It was a good thing most of them had never flown before, because that meant they hadn't nearly fallen to their deaths, unlike Hiccup. Apparently the sensation of falling was a common nightmare; it was infinitely worse when you were still awake. He'd woken up in a cold sweat for days afterwards, the crazy screeching, rushing sound of the wind lingering in his ears...Oh, and he needed a plan. There was no way he'd be able to stop the ships short of blowing them up. Considering that Toothless was chained on board, that wasn't an option. He was certain that his father's plans for the dragon didn't include a return trip to Berk. Hiccup's own crazy idea had pretty much consisted of "Get the others in the ring with a bunch of dragons \_without\_ anyone attacking anyone else." Tacked on at the end was, "Maybe, possibly, somehow, fly to the ships, Odin, Thor, whoever's out there, it has to work, it can't not work, aaaaaaargh, we're gonna die." He hadn't even thought about what came next, assuming their parents weren't already reduced to digestive juices. Or ashes.

"Well, there's two heads," said Astrid, jerking Hiccup out of his private Looming Volcano of Doom. "This may seem like a novel idea, but you guys could share."

"Oh, perfect. Now I'm stuck with her. This is all because we're twins, right?" grumbled Tuffnut as he sidled toward the Zippleback.

"What, you don't like me?" said Ruffnut, targeting his jaw with surgical precision.

"Hey, what about Hiccup?" called Snotlout. "You don't even have a dragon, O great trainer."

Hiccup's heart sank even further. At this rate it would hit bedrock. Damn! How could he not have thought of that? Stupid! Useless! While he furiously tried to think of both a solution and a snappy comeback, Astrid came to his rescue.

"He," she said as though stating the obvious, "is coming with me."

The smug look jumped off Snotlout's face and landed on Hiccup. Meanwhile, his own expression of horror, displaced by the new tenant, settled into the newly vacated lot nearby.

"Okay, guys," said Hiccup, hopping up next to Astrid. He tried to sound as if he had confidence in them. "Let's fly."

At least they were all wearing helmets.

They (meaning those shadowy-featured powers at Dreamworks) probably cut the first group training for time/budget reasons. Sure, it would have been fun to see, but I approve of their decision, story-wise. It makes the miraculous appearance of the dragon riders seem even more, well, miraculous. When they turn up, there's a ridiculously upbeat riff on the "Dragon Battle" theme that's a blast. That trumpet! Those chimes! It just makes you go, What the hell?

Guess the Terror missed out on the battle.

## 2. In the night

\_CRACK.\_

\_Then an even more terrible\_ snap,\_ as the impact of a gigantic tail broke the safety line, tearing him off the saddle, foot painfully wrenched from the stirrup...\_

\_He was falling, Toothless diving after him but too far away, falling, falling through fire, down, down, the ground rushed upwards - \_

\_"TOOTH-"\_

\* \* \*

><p>Hiccup jerked awake.<p>

"-LEss - !" died on his lips.

Across the darkened room, one green eye opened, and a low growl dragged itself out of sleep.

He was in bed. It was still nighttime.

"Sorry, bud," he rasped weakly, breathing hard. "Bad dream."

Toothless opened his other eye, lifting his head to gaze at Hiccup in concern.

"Just need a minute," gasped Hiccup. "Go back to sleep."

Footfalls padding across the floor told him Toothless hadn't listened.

"I'm fine," he hissed, heart thudding like Thor on a bad day. "Bad dream, 's all. No - get down -"

Toothless had his front feet on the bed, urgently nosing Hiccup's face. He grabbed the boy's arm in his gummy mouth and pulled.

"Stop that, I'm trying to go back to sleep - " Toothless pulled more insistently.

"Quit it!" Hiccup yanked his arm out of the dragon's mouth. He rolled over, back facing Toothless, and wrapped the covers tightly around his shoulders.

Seconds later, Toothless ripped the blanket away with a mighty tug.

Hiccup kept his eyes shut tight, playing dead.

The dragon spat out the blanket with a huff of annoyance, which Hiccup ignored. He slowed his breathing down to match Toothless's, felt himself slowly drifting off...

\_CRACK - snap - falling - diving - \_

"TOOTHLESS!"

Awake again, Hiccup drew a deep, shuddering breath. He sat up in the dark and pressed his palms against his eyelids.

More pulling on the arm. This time there were teeth.

"Ow! Toothless, what are you doing? " Ninety pounds of raw Vikingness were not-so-slowly but very surely being dragged towards the edge of the bed. The message was clear: Get up.

"Wait, I don't have my - "

THUD.

" - leg. Ow." He levered himself up to a sitting position. Toothless crooned softly. \_Oops.\_

"Okay, I'm up. What do you want?"

The dragon crouched belly to the ground, exposing his broad, scaly back.

"Flying? Now? Fine. Let me get my - " A finned tail blocked his way. Toothless snorted and tossed his head. \_  
><em>

"Okay, okay." Hiccup grabbed a handy ear nub and pulled himself up, causing Toothless to growl in irritation.

"Should have thought of that before you knocked me out of bed." Feeling unbalanced, Hiccup settled awkwardly into the hollow between Toothless' wings and shoulders.

"Where're we going, bud?"

Toothless padded over to his own sleeping rock. He warmed it with a quick blast of flame, then unceremoniously tipped Hiccup onto the stone. A few shuffling turns later, he was curled around the

shivering boy. For good measure, he draped one leathery wing over his charge.

Inside the Toothless-tent, Hiccup struggled halfheartedly, even making a token attempt to pry up the wing membrane above him. It refused to move.

"Don't tell me that was all just for this."

Mock snoring.

"Dragons don't snore," he grumbled. "And if you don't give me at least a crack, I'm going to suffocate."

The wing lifted half a finger's-width.

On the whole, it wasn't too bad. The stone beneath radiated its heat, and Toothless was as good the forge hearth. Hiccup rested his head on Toothless's stomach, feeling the rise and fall of air rushing through enormous lungs. He curled deeper into the dragon's side and caught the scent of smoked fish and metal.

\_I could make this a habit,\_ he thought sleepily.

"Thanks, bud," he mumbled.

Toothless didn't mention it.

Pretty soon, a set of fake snores faded away, and muffled real ones took their place.

\* \* \*

><p><em>"In the Meantime" is now my designated dumping ground for HTTYD drabbles.<em>

### 3. Lost and found

\_Hiccup stared at the crude wooden box in his arms. on the lid were charcoal markings that, with a liberal amount of imagination, could possible express the giver's wishes for a "Hape Snogltog."\_

\_"You gonna open it or what?" demanded Snotlout.\_

\_Truth be told, Hiccup didn't know if he wanted to find out what on Midgard could be inside. He had no idea what Snotlout thought would make a nice present. He resisted the urge to give it a good shake, in case the thing inside was still alive. Watched expectantly by his cousin, he gingerly pried off the lid.\_

\_Confusion, shock, and revulsion crossed Hiccup's face, in that order. he was now the proud owner of several spinelike bones, still held together by bits of blackened, desiccated skin.\_

\_"Wow," he finally managed to get out. "Wow. This...This is really... something. Ha ha." Toothless sniffed the box curiously. "Hey, you recognize this, bud?" It reeked of Snotlout, but the dragon knew what it was, all right. He just no longer associated it with himself.\_

\_Hiccup wasn't showing the proper elation. Snotlout was irritated. "No need to thank me or anything, " he prompted, folding his burly arms. What an ungrateful wretch. And after all the trouble he went through to get that thing, too...\_

\* \* \*

><p>The morning after was always the worst. You woke up tired, because you'd spent the night valiantly fending off dragons, and cold, because the roof had had a hole burnt in it, and in a bad mood, because now you had to fix the hole. And rebuild about a hundred other buildings. Dragon battle over, now everyone had to get down to the less thrilling aspects of living in a wooden village.<p>

"'We have to help each other,'" he mimicked the chief, angrily pounding on a shingle. "What a load of touchy-feely crap. What happened to 'We're Vikings, we do it ourselves'?"

Maybe everyone wouldn't need so much helping if Hiccup wasn't knocking over flaming beacons all the time. His cousin never had to face the consequences for his actions. After the bucket of nails fiasco, he'd been expressly banned from a twenty-foot radius around all construction sites. Hiccup never had to help other people. In fact, he gave \_reverse\_ \_help\_, like when yet another of his crazy inventions took out Sven right in the middle of last night's battle. Snotlout snorted. It made sense, since he acted the complete opposite of a Viking.

Right not was a great example: Hiccup was trotting stealthily towards the forest when he should be holed up in the forge, fixing their weapons. Lazy bum.

"Oi!" Snotlout yelled from the rooftop. "Found your Night Fury yet?" he jeered.

Hiccup paused without turning around. Then he hunched his shoulders and ran even faster. Snotlout stopped mid-hammerswing. This was too good a chance to pass up. A little Hiccup heckling was just what he needed to brighten his day. He clambered down the ladder, keeping an eye out for his father. Spitelout was nowhere in sight, having left his son to do the dirty work while he went to boast of his previous night's deeds to the other men.

Hiccup had been swallowed up by the forest. Probably heading for Raven Point, he thought, remembering something his cousin had been jabbering. Snotlout grinned. "Look, I'm being helpful," he said to an imaginary Stoick. "I'm helping Hiccup find his dragon." At the moment, Hiccup was nowhere in sight, but that didn't deter him. There was a shortcut around the base of the cliffs. High tide wasn't for another few hours, so the coast was clear. Literally.

Knowing Hiccup, the guy was so damn stubborn that he'd search the whole point before giving up. And Snotlout would be there for him, every step of the way. marching through the underbrush, he happily prepared mental insults to throw. \_Oh, hey, I see you haven't found your dragon yet. That's because THERE ISN'T ONE! HA HA HA!\_

The smell of smoke stopped him dead in his tracks. Out here in the forest, not a house in sight, fire meant dragons. He gulped, gripping

his hammer. While he could definitely take out a dragon anytime, he had to admit that he hadn't actually been through dragon training yet. Those were just formalities, probably. Besides, nothing could replace the Viking blood running through his veins right? (\_Yup, so you better make sure it stays there, said a little voice from his limbic center.\_)

He dared to creep around the trunk of a tree. For an infinitesimal moment, he wondered if the last thing he saw would be a blast of blue flame. Then he came to senses. No way had Hiccup actually downed a Night Fury. Successful Hiccup was an oxymoron. It was one of those things that just didn't happen, like soap.

nevertheless, he was relieved when all that revealed itself were the still-smoldering remains of a pine. Emboldened, he circled the tree cautiously. One of the main branches had been nearly torn off, as if wrenched downward by an immense force. Smeared on the wood was a dark substance that definitely wasn't sap. His eyes followed the spatter to the split in the trunk.

Caught in the crack was a dark-colored scrap of something. It was wedged tightly, but no match for his bulging biceps. Snotlout pulled down a raggedy, blood-encrusted mess of bone and flesh.

"No freaking way," he breathed, examining his find. Enough of the skin remained intact to show the unmistakable texture of scales. Smoother than a Gronkle, nublier than a Zippleback's hide, it didn't match any dragon he'd ever seen. Which left the one dragon no one had ever seen.

"He did it! He hit a freaking Night Fury!"

Yet, there was no carcass in sight. It was till running around, then. Spinning about, he peered into the undergrowth, searching for a glimpse of-what? No one actually knew what they looked like. Big and scaly, he'd wager. Images of exploding guard towers filled his mind's eye, and the prospect of trudging through the misty forest suddenly became much less appealing. Clutching his trophy, Snotlout ran as fast as he could all the way back to the village. he was sure he heard an enraged roar issue from the trees behind him.

\* \* \*

><p>The usual gang was clustered in the shadow of the storehouse. Snotlout had thought it wise to avoid his own house for a while.<p>

"Check it out," he said in a dramatic whisper. "Genuine piece of Night Fury." He pulled out his prize with a flourish.

"Where'd you get that?" demanded Fishlegs.

"Tore it off when I wrestled it," said Snotlout casually. "With my face." That sounded much more impressive than "I found it in a tree" or, gods forbid, "It's from the one that Hiccup caught." Hiccup hadn't returned from the forest yet, but he wasn't too worried.

Fishlegs was surprised. "Like, on the ground?"



"Duh. Do I look like I can fly?"

"But they say that Night Furies never touch land," said Fishlegs, unconvinced.

"Shows what you know. This one did."

Astrid was similarly unconvinced. She'd endured years of Snotlout's cupposed heroics. "If no one's ever seen a Night Fury, how do you know what it was?"

"Well, what else could it be? This look like a Gronkle to you?"

"It's so beat up, it could be anything. Even your dad's boot."

Snotlout appealed to the twins. They usually bought whatever he was selling.

"It's kind of...mangled," said Tuffnut.

"Yeah, like our cat after the bed fell on it," snickered Ruffnut. "Wait, that's not our cat, is it? 'Causse we buried him on a boat."

"I don't believe it," decided Astrid.

"What? We did. I can dig him back out to prove it."

Snotlout was devastated. Even worse, that afternoon he saw Hiccup tottering up the hill to the chief's house, clearly unharmed.

\* \* \*

><p>In the days that followed, Hiccup didn't make another peep about a Night Fury, dead or alive. There was a noticeable lack of uproar about a downed dragon in the hills. The find from the forest went into a box underneath Snotlout's bed. Every night when he flopped onto the covers, sore from dragon training, he'd reach down and pull it out. "I know you're out there," he'd mutter to the darkness. "I'll be back." The distinction of being the first Viking to kill a Night Fury would be his alone.<p>

\* \* \*

><p><em>Inspired by the an image from AvannaK's Tumblr. It's weird to think of that missing tail fin, lying somewhere lonely in the forest.<em>

#### 4. Similar But Different

\_This collection has been updated pretty much never, since I've been focusing my writing energies on the ROTG crossovers. But recently inspiration came out of nowhere and it struck me hard, like lightning. Or death.\_

\* \* \*

><p>4. Similar But Different<p>

Something is wrong with our flying. I don't know what it is, but I'm working on it. Hiccup doesn't know it yet, but he notices, too.

"Sorry about that, bud," he says after we kind of wobble after coming out of a spiral. I tilt awkwardly to the side before leveling out again.

Normally, Hiccup is very, very good at flying. I am more than a little proud of him, especially when I remember how bad he was at the beginning. In those days, the only reason I put up with his "flying" was because bruises or no, he was the only way I could get back in the sky.

Now Hiccup doesn't make stupid mistakes like he used to. After he got his metal leg, he made some medium-idiotic ones, but that watchtower was about to collapse anyway. Besides, I think Hiccup was secretly happy for the chance to build the new wind-turning-mill to replace it. These days, if Hiccup messes up with my Hiccup-fin, he does it in a small enough way that I can compensate with my good fin to pull us out of it.

Lately, though, that hasn't been working. Hiccup has to push the Hiccup-fin harder and harder, until I can hear the metal clicking with every maneuver.

"We never had a problem with that spin before," he says, and I can hear the frown in his voice. "I thought it was just my fault at first, but something's up with your tail, bud. I'd better check the rig when we get home."

Tricks are fun, but just gliding is nice, too. We take it slow and easy on the way home, riding smooth on the wind.

Hiccup's tail-plan papers are in his forge workshop. He fetches them and then we go home, where he spreads them out all over the floor. He takes off the rig and my Hiccup-fin and lays them on top of the papers.

"I don't get it," he says. "Everything's the same as before."

I'm up in the wood beams above him, looking down on his head. This way, I can see over his shoulder without accidentally moving his papers or the fiddly bits of leather and metal. He has taken my Hiccup-fin apart and it's lying in pieces all over the place. The same pieces are also in the papers, captured in flat black charcoal lines.

I study them along with Hiccup, and after a while I think I can understand how the Hiccup-fin works. All those different parts, working together to do what I used to do without thinking. Hiccup makes it look very complicated. Then again, I never would have figured out how to make a new tail for myself, or even making one in the first place. I also never would have thought of asking a Viking for help, because they would have tried to kill me.

But Hiccup did all of those things, even though I came \_this \_close to killing him. (To be fair, he tried to kill me, too. Twice.)

Because that's what Hiccup does: new things. He is the smartest Viking on the island. Astrid is smart, too, but she's different. She is Viking-smart. Hiccup is making-things-smart, and in my opinion that is the most useful kind.

\* \* \*

><p>Even though we won't be flying, I wake him up anyway. "Really, Toothless?" he grumbles. "I thought that maybe, just maybe, I would get to sleep in today."<p>

\_We would be flying if you didn't have to fix the fin, \_I say.

"No use putting it off, I guess," he says. "We're not going anywhere until I fix your tail." He starts on his getting-up routine, which consists of:

1. Putting on his metal leg.
2. Putting on his vest.

I go down to the village and get a few fish for myself. When I come back, he has his own breakfast ready and is looking at the papers again.

"Morning, son," says Stoick-the-Chief as he thumps down the stairs. He nods at me. "Dragon," he says.

Some Vikings are still afraid of me, especially not-Berk ones. Stoick-the-Chief isn't afraid of anything (except maybe Hiccup's stupidity), but I make him nervous. This is as it should be, since I am a ferocious dragon who can blow up whole ships in one go. Stoick-the-Chief knows this, but then he sees Hiccup goofing off with me, and Hiccup's not getting his head blown off, so then Stoick-the-Chief isn't sure what he should think. Then some not-Berk Vikings try to attack us, and so I blow their ships up, and that makes him doubly not sure.

Hiccup, for his part, isn't scared of me at all. Hiccup just sees his goofy best friend who likes to chase shiny lights. This doesn't bother me, because I know that if I have to, I can be a truly fearsome beast who won't hesitate to blow someone up. Even if Hiccup forgets this, I can remember.

"You're back early, son," says Stoick-the-Chief, dipping into his own bowl of breakfast.

"No, we didn't go this morning," says Hiccup, not looking up from his papers. "I've got to make a few adjustments to Toothless's tail."

They finish eating. Stoick-the-Chief goes off chiefing, and Hiccup and I head down to the forge. On the way, we run into the matching 'Nuts.

"Hey, could you guys tell Astrid not to wait up for me?" he says. "I've got to do some work in the forge."

"Sure, whatever," says Tuffnut. The 'Nuts have got a look to their faces that means, Sure, they'll tell Astrid something \_like\_ his

message. This could turn out to be interesting later.

I don't have to wait that long. Astrid catches up to us before we get to the forge.

"Hiccup!" she says. "You're not really that scared, are you?"

"Oh, hi, Astrid," he says. "No, of course I'm not scared, it's just been acting up, and I thought I'd give it a check up, and you're looking at me like you have no idea what I'm talking about so I'm going to stop talking. \_What did the twins tell you?\_"

"Apparently you're so scared that I'm going to beat you that you invented some lame excuse about having to work in the forge."

Hiccup says, "No. I. Didn't. Toothless's tail has been weird lately, so I'm going to try and find out what the heck is the problem is and, hopefully, fix it. Also, you know that there is no way that you are faster than us."

Astrid pretends that she doesn't believe it and keeps teasing him. I can tell Hiccup doesn't mind; he acts annoyed, but he's happy that Astrid's there. Besides, we know that we've won the last five races against.

We're at the forge. Hiccup starts to say good-bye, good luck, don't let Snotlout win, but before he can, Astrid says, "Are you okay?"

Hiccup is confused. "Who, me? I'm fine."

"You're limping," she says.

"No, I'm not," he says.

"Walk over there, like you just were," she says, pointing. Hiccup doesn't move for a second. Astrid says, "Do it!" and gives him a shove to make him go.

He looks over his shoulder and says, "If this is some kind of metal leg joke, I'm really not getting it, so you can tell Snotlout and the twins to come out now."

Astrid says, "You're definitely limping." I take a good look; he is walking kind of unevenly, with one side sticking out more. How did I not notice before?

\_She's right, \_I say.

"Oh no, not you, too," says Hiccup. "Fine, okay, I'm limping, now just let me get some work done so we can race. Ol' metal leg is still faster than you can ever dream of being."

Astrid has won, so she goes away. Hiccup turns around and sees Gobber, who has been watching with interest. "Nothing wrong with a healthy lurch," Gobber says, thunking his own wooden peg. "Well, maybe not in this case ... "

"Aw, come on," says Hiccup. "Even Toothless is ganging up on me!"

Gobber gives him a strange look. I know that look, it's the one that means, You are a seriously confused Viking who thinks he's a dragon.

Astrid gave him that look not so long ago, after Hiccup told her something I said.

"You mean you can understand him?" she asked.

Hiccup shrugged. "Sure. Can't you?"

Astrid gave him that look, the one I was just talking about.

"Don't pretend Stormfly doesn't talk to you, too," Hiccup said. "Like, I don't know, 'That was a delicious piece of raw chicken, Astrid!' or 'Wow, I look gorgeous today!'"

I snorted when he said that because that's it. That's Stormfly in an eggshell.

"Okay, maybe she does," Astrid relented. "But 'Don't wear your helmet because it will fall off during the loop-de-loops and I'm not getting it back this time, I already owe that Thunderdrum a favor'?! There is no way you could have gotten that!"

"He made a reasonable point," said Hiccup. "Toothless, you tell her."

Astrid looked at me. I looked at her. I waited. She leaned in closer.

I said, as loud and clear as I could, \_Hiccup is much more intelligent than you.\_\_  
><em>

Her eyes went wide. She made a movement like she wanted to punch me, but didn't, which showed at least a little intelligence on her part. She punched Hiccup instead.

"Ow!" he said, but he was grinning. "See? You got that."

"Did you - did he - " Astrid spluttered. "Did you see the \_look \_he just gave me?"

"He didn't mean it," said Hiccup.

\_I did too mean it, \_I said, but Astrid didn't notice. Hiccup did, though, and he elbowed me in the side. I laughed at him then, because Hiccup is so small that it felt like being poked with a twig.

But maybe he isn't as small as he used to be.

Gobber looks him up and down with expert eyes. "Get in here," he says.

Despite Hiccup's protests he makes him sit on the big table with his good foot and his metal one hanging off the side. "Uh huh, uh huh," says Gobber.

"What?" says Hiccup. "Everything's good as new."

"That," Gobber says slowly, "might not be a good thing." He pulls out a stepstool for Hiccup to rest his feet on. "Just as I thought," he says. "Most Vikings have to wait until they're already great strapping warriors to lose their first limb, but you got lucky. Look at that."

I look.

Hiccup's good foot is resting on the stool. His metal leg stops about an inch above that.

"I never thought I'd see that day," says Gobber, "but you're growing, lad."

Hiccup is incredulous. He swings his legs up and stretches them out in front of him. Sure enough, the metal one is shorter. Not by a lot, but it's clear that it ends sooner than his good leg does.

"Looks like it's time for a few tweaks," Gobber says. "Or should I leave that to you?"

"Nah, I've got some ideas already." Hiccup has the making-things gleam in his eyes. We're going to be swapping out night flying for forgework. "What if I did this ... Or made a rotating cuff ... or maybe retractable ... " He grabs a piece of paper and scribbles down a few things. Then he pushes the paper to one side. "Aaagh. Later, later. What I was really going to do before Astrid pounced on me was find out what's wrong with Toothless's taiaaaaaaand I'm an idiot."

He smacks his head with his hand. "Why didn't I think of this, bud? Because I'm an idiot. That's why."

At this point, Gobber wisely decides to leave us alone.

"Lemme see your tail, bud," he says. He unfurls the Hiccup-fin and flips it over, so it's lying on top of my good one. They're lined up edge-to-edge, except they're not - the edge of my good fin sticks out all the way around. "Dangit, how did I not notice?"

\_I didn't notice, either,\_ I say, intrigued.

"Guess I'm not the only one who's growing," he says. "It's time for someone to get a new rig."

I'm excited; I've never caught myself growing before. "Pretty cool, right?" says Hiccup. He pauses for a moment. "I can't believe I've never asked you this, Toothless, but how old are you?"

I stop trying to see myself and focus on him. \_How do you mean,\_ I say.

"In dragon years, I mean," he adds.

\_I still have a long way to fly,\_ I say.

"What about in Viking years?"

This one requires some thought. I take into account how old Hiccup says he is, and the fact that he's relatively youngish. \_In Viking years, \_I say at last, \_I am an old Viking.\_

"Oh," he says, surprised and a little sad. "Come to think of it, Berk already had a Night Fury legend when my dad was a kid, and that entry in the Book of Dragons looks pretty old. I wonder if that was you all along?"

I don't say anything, because I honestly don't know. Before Hiccup, I didn't pay much attention to individual Vikings. They were just the little hairy shouting things that ran around on the ground and occasionally threw an axe at the sheep-stealers. One of the could have been Stoick-the-Chief. I don't know.

Hiccup sees that I don't have an answer for him. He's still curious, but instead of pressing further he gets back to frowning over how to make a new Hiccup-fin for me and a new metal leg for himself.

I watch him. I have a lot of extra energy to burn, since we didn't go flying this morning. Probably later I'll romp around Berk a little, and when the rest of our friends come back I'll go and find out who won the race. It'll be Stormfly, I bet. She'll want to brag about her victory, and I'll goof around with her. By that time Hiccup should be coming back to himself, and he'll look up and wonder where I've gone, so I'll come back to see what work he's gotten done.

But right now, I hold still and watch him draw up his plans like spiders spin webs. Not for the first time, I wonder what it's like inside Hiccup's head. It must be very crowded, with dragons and Vikings and mechanisms and me all vying for his attention.

"How's this?" he says, holding up a piece of paper.

\_As long as it works, \_I say. He grins and goes back to scribbling furiously. A little bit later, "Whaddaya think? Looks good, right?"

This goes on for a while. I'm not actually helping him; if he didn't have me, he's probably just mutter to himself. Occasionally he holds up something that's really insane, like dragon wings that he can strap to his arms, and I tell him, \_Absolutely not.\_ He just smiles and tucks it away for later. I know that he's going to build them anyway, and show up expecting me to let him jump off cliffsides.

But no matter how ridiculous his creations are, they are something new, something that we can share just between the two of us. And although Hiccup doesn't always listen when I talk, he always understands what I'm trying to say.

\* \* \*

><p><em>One of the decisions Dean DuBlois and Michael Saunders made when they took on HTTYD was that there would be no magic. Consequently, it always bugs me a little to read fanfics with magic and telepathy and whatnot. <em>

\_Not that it can't be done - \_To Soar Into The Sunset \_(by Fjord Mustang) \_\_is one of the best reads out there, and it features a mental link between Hiccup and Toothless. But in terms of movie

canon, I think that Toothless is just a very expressive dragon, and Hiccup is a dragon-body-language-readin' genius. \_

\_So their dialogue is kind of ambiguous. They're definitely on the same wavelength, but there's a bit of mismatch, where Hiccup could just be talking to himself.\_

\_(Added: For the record, I've read the Cressida Cowell books. They're great in their own way, but also very, very different in tone and style from the movie. The HTTYD directors made a conscious decision to make a naturalistic movie, rather than a fantasy, so I respect their decision immensely. After all, HTTYD as we know it wouldn't exist otherwise.)\_

End  
file.